

# THE BEAST OF BRAV

**Fed up with the Hollywood mainstream? Ready to sample something daft and dangerous? Then you need to tune your satellite into the Bravo channel, where some of the weirdest pictures of all time are getting a regular airing. Our resident "B" movie specialist Allan Bryce reveals some of the delights in store for those who are prepared to do the time warp...**

**W**ay back in the mists of time, before yours truly was old enough to sneak in to see horror movies, one of my earliest memories is of passing a cinema showing the must-see double-bill of *The Four Skulls Of Jonathan Drake* and *I Married A Monster From Outer Space*. I ran these titles through my mental projector for days

afterwards, trying desperately to imagine the macabre delights in store for the lucky punters old enough to experience them.

Many years later I did actually get to see both of these movies, and though I enjoyed them a great deal, by that time I realised there was no way they could equal the promise of their lurid titles. However, like most horror fans I still have a soft spot - presumably somewhere between my ears - for cheap and cheerful genre flicks from the 50s and 60s. The problem is that now I'm old enough to see them, they just don't seem to be around much any more.

Fortunately though, satellite TV has come to my rescue. And in particular the Bravo channel, which my wife calls The Chumondley

Warner Channel, because it's full of old telly shows from the days when they used to speak the sort of stilted BBC English they do in the Harry Enfield ads. Bravo call themselves Time Warp telly, and indeed, spending an evening with them is like returning to a different and certainly more law-abiding time, when even the police knew how to pronounce their *H's*, and the only fitting up that got done was in a tailor's shop! Bravo screen lots of great old shows like *Saber Of London*, and

*Scotland Yard*. But they remain dearest to my heart because of their choice of movie programming. Under the blanket title of "The Weirdest Of Bravo" they put out a huge variety of some of the wildest movies ever made, many of them horror and sci-fi efforts from the 50s and 60s, and if you're any sort of fan of this era then you really owe it to yourself to check them out.

For example, Bravo's *The Curse Of The Stone Hand* is probably the only chance you'll ever get to see a Chilean horror movie. The fact that it makes absolutely no sense whatsoever should not spoil your enjoyment. John Carradine is an evil hypnotist, Katherine Victor is somebody's sister, and the hodge-podge of a plot is all about a family curse. The film was made by joining together a 1946 Chilean horror flick with a 1959 Mexican film entitled *The Suicide Club*, and I'm willing to bet that as it unreels in front of your startled eyes, your reaction will be: "Caramba!"

## VOODOO RITUALS!

For an absurd aperitif try *The Creature Of The Walking Dead*, which was similarly produced by the notorious Jerry Warren, an American entrepreneur who throughout the 60s imported a job lot of Mexican horrors to thrust upon the uncomprehending drive-in viewers of America. In this one a scientist revives the body of his dead grandfather and the walking







GROWING...!  
GROWING...!  
GROWING...!  
to a GIANT...!  
to a MONSTER...!

**WHEN  
WILL IT  
STOP?**

# THE AMAZING COLOSSAL MAN



corpse is forced to kill for blood to stay strong. That's the Mex footage, while Warren spliced in extra stuff to make up the running time. Katherine Victor conducts a seance and police inspector Bruno Ve Sota rattles on about various killings as if he's making it all up as he went along - which he probably was.

One movie that I will definitely be making a date to watch this month is *Serpent Island*, a very rare 1954 effort from Bert I. Gordon, the director of such treats as *The Amazing Colossal Man* and *The Spider*, both of which have also turned up on Bravo recently. Bert wouldn't know a good script if it dropped on him from a great height, but his movies are always good for a laugh, particularly when they star Sonny Tufts and have a plot about voodoo sacrifices on a mysterious tropical island. Knowing Bert as I do, I wouldn't be surprised to see some pretty cheesy special effects in here too...

Also in the so-bad-it's-good category is *Mesa Of Lost Women*, which is an absolute must-see for lovers of girly-oriented 50s sci-fi. Mad scientist Jackie Coogan creates a giant tarantula and a race of superwomen with long fingernails in this totally off-the-wall 1952 classic that makes *Plan Nine From Outer Space* look like a Merchant/Ivory film. Hot women and hilarious dialogue compete for your attention - but look out for that flamenco guitar music score - it could drive you right out of your mind!

Another infamous baddie from the same era is *The Brain That Wouldn't Die*, in which confused scientist Jason Evers has rescued his girlfriend's severed head from a car accident and kept it alive with tubes and stuff, as one does. Now he needs to find a body to go with it, and being a sensible sort of guy he settles on a stripper with really big assets. His girlfriend gets mad about this though, and uses her telepathic powers on the mutant pinhead creature that Evers keeps in the cupboard. This is subversive material and should on no account be viewed by youngsters or members of Parliament.

Other black and white treats coming your way this month include screenings of *The Monster From Green Hell* (which features giant wasps menacing Jock Ewing out of *Dallas*), *The Giant Behemoth* (a sea monster threatens to decimate London in a good low budget chiller from 1958), and *Half-Human* (a rare 1955 release in which John Carradine investigates the existence of the Abominable Snowman, and finds a Japanese guy in a monkey suit).

## COLOUR ME BLOOD RED!

If you prefer your shocks in colour then Bravo have a nice smattering of more up to date horror titles like *Fright*, a psychothriller from the 70s with Ian Bannen as a psycho terrorising babysitter Susan George - note that this gives us the first onscreen teaming of George Cole and Dennis Waterman. *Theatre Of Death* (1968)

is a potent vampire yarn starring Christopher Lee. Then, in Hammer's *Fear In The Night* we get the late Ralph Bates plotting to drive his wife barmy a-la *Les Diaboliques*, and *The Black Torment* (1964) has a similar kind of plot in a historical setting.

Hammer fans can also take a trip to *The Lost Continent*, which was based on Dennis Wheatley's novel, *Uncharted Seas*, and gives us some very amusing papier mache monsters attacking a motley crew of seafaring misfits. But the studio's classier output is

represented by the little-seen supernatural thriller, *The Witches* (1966), which is scripted by Nigel (Quatermass) Kneale and stars Joan Fontaine as a teacher who uncovers a devil cult in a small English village. This is a superior effort from Hammer, but perhaps a little too low-key for some tastes.

Bravo are also screening Mario Bava's *Planet Of The Vampires*, which is an excellent

Italian sci-fi chiller from 1965. Directed by Mario (*Black Sunday*) Bava, this visually stylish production has echoes of *Alien* in its set design and tells of a bunch of astronauts menaced by space vampires intent on conquering earth. There's even a neat twist at the end which

takes it into *Twilight Zone* territory. My vote for best movie on Bravo next month goes to *Circus Of Horrors*, a colourful 1960 shocker which is surprisingly sick and gruesome for the time it was made. Anton Diffring stars as Dr Goethe, a plastic surgeon who hasn't quite mastered his craft. In fact at the beginning we see he has botched a facial repair job on a scarred rich

woman so badly that she has gone completely bananas and started smashing all her mirrors. Rather than give her her money back he goes on the run, piling up his car and making the police think he's dead.

A short while later he sets up in business as the owner of a travelling circus, which he uses as a front for his real business of reconstructing the faces of criminals - usually of the beautiful female variety. But when his 'creations' try to leave his little circus world, Anton sets up some nasty accidents for them involving putting the lights out during a knife-throwing act and rigging the high wire to break. It's good, gory stuff all the way, and of course Diffring eventually gets his comeuppance, but in a very surprising fashion.

Anyway, if that's given you a taster for the rare delights of the Bravo channel then I suggest you dip in further and you're sure to be hooked. The only problem is that you might then never want to watch conventional telly ever again. But is that such a big deal? Give me *Scotland Yard* over *The Bill* any day of the week...





nothing to do with the scandalous Henry Miller novel).

Stock stars and familiar faces



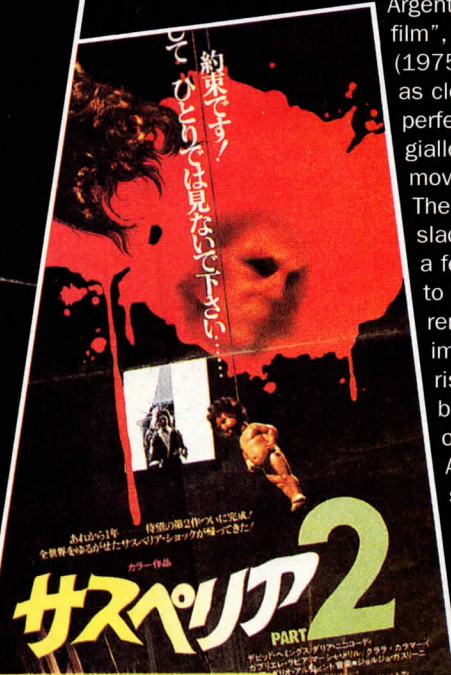
include Marc Porel and Jean Sorel, Luigi Pistilli, Ray "Manchester Morgue" Lovelock, the menacing presence of Ivan Rassimov, slimy "Howard Ross" (Renato Rossini) and handsome George Hilton, the latter frequently paired to great effect by Sergio Martino and others with gorgeous Edwige Fenech, the ingenue incarnate of Italian thrillers. Her friends and foes in these things include the likes of Evelyn Stewart, Anita Strindberg and "Susan Scott" (Nieves Navarro), and other female alumni of the giallo include Marisa Mell, Marilu Tolo, Femi Benussi, Florinda Bolkan, Mimsy Farmer, Helga Line and Erika Blank. Barbara's Bach (Mrs Ringo Starr) and Bouchet provide further easy-on-the-eye adornment to many a giallo.

Suzy Kendall took on iconic status after her appearance in Argento's *Bird With The Crystal Plumage*, leading to castings in such lesser efforts as Umberto Lenzi's *Spasmo* (1974) and *Torso*, also in Sidney Hayers' *Assault*, an intriguing early 70's British attempt to take off the giallo format that has Kendall wandering around pondering the

meaning of a clue she glimpsed when interrupting a sex killer at work. The most fertile soil for surrogate gialli, though, has been Spanish. Leon Klimovsky's *A Dragonfly For Each Corpse* (1973) features Paul Naschy as a hardboiled cop, Juan Piquer Simon's *Pieces* (1981) makes much of angst-ridden youthful sexual misadventures as a motive, and Jesus Franco's *Bloody Moon* (also 1981) is just bloody awful!

## THE SCREAMING MIMI

Yet another Spanish effort, art-house darling Pedro Almodovar's *Matador* (1986) goes so far as to include, in its ultra-perverse title sequence, clips from *Blood and Black Lace* that censors have seen fit to remove from most prints of Bava's



film. Nor is this the only homage to be paid to the genre from surprisingly "up-market" sources - Martin Scorsese (a director admired by the kind of folks who would consider Italian exploitation efforts beneath their contempt) is a big fan of both Freda and

Bava.

Furthermore, the borders of Italian Art and exploitation have frequently been

## New York Ripper: "It was the duck that broke in his brain..."

blurred: Argento's *Bird with The Crystal Plumage* represented a gazumping of Bernardo Bertolucci's ambitions to adapt the same source material, Fredric Brown's classic pulp novel *The Screaming Mimi*. Michelangelo Antonioni was originally to have directed what became Carlo Vanzina's *Nothing Underneath* (1987), and Antonioni's arty *Blow Up* (1966) led to a rash of "swinging London" gialli (notably Fulci's *Lizard in a Woman's Skin*) and ultimately

Argento's "answer film", *Deep Red* (1975) which came as close to perfecting the giallo form as any movie ever has. The genre then slackened off for a few years, only to be given a renewed impetus by the rise of its bastard offspring, the American slasher movie, before virtually petering out a decade later.

Argento pressed on with increasingly personal, radical, and badly received experiments, everybody else just blanded up their act in the drive to get product placed on Italy's ever-multiplying TV channels. Even so, in the last few years there's been Fulci's jaw-dropping *The Cat in My Brain*, Bruno Gaburro's *La Morta e di Moda*, Alfonso Brescia's *Homicide in Blue Light* and most recently, of course, Argento's *Trauma*, extending the run of the giallo to upward of 30 years ... which, in the ultra-fickle,

terminally trend-conscious world of Italian film production, amounts to a very long run indeed. The yellow peril lives!